

1962 SMITH - sib of Theresa '64, Dennis '70

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Paul William Smith Jr., 66

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Colonel Paul William Smith, 66, died at home Thursday, July 15, 2010. He was surrounded by family when he succumbed to advanced metastatic melanoma.

Visitation, rosary and funeral Mass were held at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Anchorage, Alaska. He was buried with full military honors at Fort Richardson National Cemetery.

Born in Sandpoint, Feb. 13, 1944, to Paul William and Elizabeth Josephine Smith, he spent his childhood in North Idaho and Washington state. His family settled in Coeur d'Alene in 1953 where Paul attended St. Thomas Catholic Grade School. He spent six years at Holy Redeemer College, a Redemptorist seminary in Oakland, Calif., and was a graduate of Gonzaga University, Spokane, Wash. in 1967.

He referred to his time at Holy Redeemer College as his "greenhouse years." He explained that the school both protected the seminarians from the outside world, and that it watered and fed them and hoped that vocations would grow.

In 1968, Paul married Cheryl Eugene of Spokane and their married life took them to various places as he was transferred in the service of his country. They spent three years in Taiwan, and in 1973, Paul, Cheryl and their growing family moved to Anchorage, Alaska.

Colonel Smith enjoyed a distinguished 32-year military career. He joined the Air Force in 1967, earning his silver navigator wings in 1970. Paul flew combat missions throughout Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War while based in Taiwan, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross. Arriving at Elmendorf Air Force Base in 1973, he flew ski-equipped C-130D aircraft on the Greenland icecap.

Paul joined the Alaska Air National Guard in 1976 flying worldwide missions in the C-130 until retirement in 1999. In addition to serving as Chief Navigator, he commanded the 176th Operational Support Flight and the 176th Operations Group. He flew more than 8,000 flight hours. Additional military decorations include the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, three Air Medals and many others.

After retirement, Paul's love of air travel prompted him to a new career at Alaska Airlines. This allowed him to continue a lifelong interest in visiting different countries, often accompanied by one or more of his five sons.

His love of travel is what his loved ones remember as his defining characteristic. His career as a navigator dovetailed with his desire to see every corner of the world. He visited every continent except Antarctica. Paul explained his desire to travel as being part of him throughout his life. As a small boy on his parents farm, when he saw a car go by, he wished he were in that car. At seminary, when he heard a train go by, he wished he were on that train. Later, whenever he saw a plane go by, he wished that he were on it.

Paul's travels were both far and near. His children recall many camping excursions around Alaska with the "pop-up" trailer. He even entered a lottery for land north of Anchorage. He encouraged his sons to continue camping and fishing with their own children.

Paul was an avid downhill skier, which he even continued throughout his fight with cancer. He was also involved for several years with the annual musical productions of CHAOS (Committee for Handling Alaska's Outstanding Spectaculars) at his parish, St. Patrick's Catholic Church. He loved to read, and in fact, the first significant purchase of his adult life was the Great Books Series, though he wasn't allowed to keep them in the living room.

Paul is survived by his wife, Cheryl; his two sisters, Theresa Esztergalyos of Vancouver, Wash., and Celine Lehman of Coeur d'Alene; his five sons, Paul William III, Daniel, Matthew, Peter and Alan; and six grandchildren, Alexander, Denali, Margarete, Eleanor, Julia and Finnegan.

Paul was preceded in death by his unborn sons, John and James, his parents, and younger brother, Dennis.